

Robert Land Academy: What the 1986 Tax Case and 1985 McGovern Letter Reveal

McGovern admits he routinely lied to parents about their children's diagnoses while conducting experiments on them in a military behavioral modification program that governed both staff and cadets "from start to finish" - a program so rigid it remained largely unchanged from 1978 through at least 2015.

1. The "Controlled Study" - Comparing Horizons to RLA

From the 1985 letter (page 3):

"We did a controlled study after starting Robert Land Academy in 1979. We systematically assessed twenty youngsters in the very expensive (\$32,000.00 per year) treatment centre setting, and twenty youngsters with the same age and the same disorder (controls) in the Robert Land Academy Military setting."

The study compared:

- 20 kids at Horizons Treatment Centre (\$32,000/year)
- 20 kids at RLA (same disorders, cheaper option)
- Both located "a few hundred yards apart on the same 160 acres"

"The results show a dramatic difference between the two settings... The boys in the military program boasted about how authentically difficult the program was, in comparison with the less authentic, less stimulating, less structured treatment centre setting, that was spending all sorts of tax dollars to provide optimal education and recreation."

The economics are clear: RLA was marketed as cheaper but more effective than the government-funded treatment centre.

2. Scott Bowman's "Qualifications" to Run a Psychiatric Facility

McGovern reveals Bowman's credentials (page 1):

"Scott Bowman was the Director of Camp Keywaatan and the Horizon's Treatment Centre from the start. He had studied Physical Education in university and was the accomplished quarterback of a university football team." (*Note that we found evidence of Scott playing football at Oakville-Trafalger High School, but at McMaster he was never listed as a quarterback - this remains to be determined).

That's it. A Physical Education degree and possibly college football experience qualified Bowman to run what McGovern repeatedly calls a psychiatric treatment facility for children with:

- "convulsive disorders and severe neurological disorders"
- "infantile autism and childhood schizophrenia"
- "personality disorders, especially of the psychopathic type"
- children "sent by training schools and Children's Aid Societies and courts when all previous therapeutic efforts had failed"

3. The Total Institution Design

McGovern's language throughout emphasizes total environmental control:

"Military commitment integrates residential life and academic life and recreational life, implementing an authentic behavioural modification program from start to finish for everyone - staff and student Cadets." (page 4)

Everything was "mandatory within the military theme" (page 5):

"Excellent physical facilities, including wholesome food and regular exercise and appropriate sleeping facilities, are made mandatory within the military theme. Extra-curricular activities... are made mandatory within the military theme."

McGovern explicitly describes controlling every moment:

"how a child was fed, bathed, toiletted, treated on getting up and put to bed, were more important than individual and group psychotherapeutic efforts." (page 8)

4. A Program Frozen in Time: 1978-2015

The rigid specificity McGovern describes in 1985 matches exactly what alumni report across five decades:

- T-shirts measured a specific way
- Bed sheets exposed a certain amount
- Socks folded a particular way
- 7 a.m. inspections by the sergeant-major (time varies)

Interviews with those from the early years show the same requirements reported by students in 1999-2000 and confirmed by those attending as late as 2015. The program was hardly altered. Why do we think this is? We have a very good idea. More to follow on this.

5. McGovern's Admission: "I Lie to Parents"

From the 1986 tax decision (page 11):

"He said that it was his practise in dealing with parents of children he examined to mask the true nature of the problem identified because of what he considered potential harm."

The judge documents how McGovern gave different diagnoses in different documents:

"while the diagnosis in each of the earlier certificates in the Kushnir and MacLean appeals are the same, the diagnosis in the certificates of November 18, 1985, are not only different from what was diagnosed earlier, but also from each other."

Dr. Cunningham's expert testimony contradicts McGovern's approach:

"Q. ...it would be very important that the parents understand what the difficulty is?
A. Yes."

6. The "Prescribed Placement" Contradiction

Letters McGovern wrote to parents:

"I have prescribed placement in Robert Land Academy"

McGovern's sworn testimony:

"No, counsellor, I never refer a case to Robert Land Academy."

7. The Plagiarism - Misrepresenting Milieu Therapy

The judge documents McGovern lifting entire passages from psychiatric texts without attribution, then misrepresenting them.

McGovern claimed this was from "Psychiatrist Sachehay":

"The therapeutic milieu must take very seriously the problem of how to convey meaning..."

The judge found:

"The quoted words are not those of Sechehaye. Bettelheim and Sanders said this..."

The actual Bettelheim/Sanders text emphasized trust and safety:

"everything is here to satisfy all his needs... he must become convinced that these satisfactions will not endanger him... Only then can he dare to begin to trust the institution's intentions and begin to get well."

But McGovern's RLA was the opposite - built on military discipline and what boys themselves called "authentically difficult."

The judge's conclusion:

"McGovern's reliability as a witness was in large measure devastated"

8. Parents Unknowingly Signing Kids Up for Experiments

McGovern describes conducting:

- "controlled study"
- "ten hours of careful, standardized assessments on each case"
- "standardized reassessment on each case and control one year later"

While simultaneously:

- Lying to parents about diagnoses
- Using vague terms like "psychologically immature" instead of real psychiatric diagnoses
- Presenting RLA as a school rather than an experimental behavioral modification program

What This All Means

The documents reveal RLA was:

1. **An experiment** run by a Physical Education major and a psychiatrist who lied to parents
2. **A total institution** controlling every aspect of life "from start to finish for everyone"
3. **Frozen in time** - the same rigid behavioral modification from 1978 through 2015
4. **Built on deception** - parents were deliberately misled about diagnoses and the program's nature
5. **Economically motivated** - positioned as cheaper than government-funded treatment
6. **Judicially discredited** - the founding psychiatrist's reliability "devastated" in court

The unchanged nature of the program across 48 years - down to how socks were folded - suggests this wasn't education that evolved with knowledge, but a rigid behavioral modification experiment that McGovern and Bowman created in the 1970s and never modified, regardless of outcomes or advancing understanding of child development.